

14 September 2022

Subj: Mr. Jerry Ryals – Character Reference

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing this personal reference on behalf of Mr. Jerry Ryals as I've known Jerry since 2014.

My husband and I had the privilege of meeting Jerry at a family outing when he was in his late teens through his mother, Mrs. Sue Kucik and step father, Mr. Joe Kucik. As a young adult, Jerry was polite, an interesting teenager with whom to converse, helpful to the family to volunteer cooking or clean up duties and inviting of newly met people. Most importantly to me, however, was his grace, patience and kindness he showed to my then 12 year old twin sons, who are non-speaking and autistic. Given my sons don't speak and often engage in what can be bothersome, non-stereotypic behaviors to which most teenagers can't relate nor tolerate [because they are more interested in what's on their smart phones], my heart was warmed to see Jerry talking to them and spending time with them and around them as though they were typical 12 year old kids. He went out of his way to include them in conversation as much as possible, help them in the bathroom (as, at that time, my sons were not toilet trained) and even helped them with snacks and food as their motor planning skills are challenged to simple tasks such as opening up a bag of snacks on their own. He engaged them in water play and even volunteered to take them on hikes and hang out with them. Needless to say, given I pay 2 people a minimum of \$25 per hour each to be with my sons due to the severity of their autism, I was quite impressed this young man was volunteering to step up to help out my family to allow my husband and me a 2 hour night out. My sons are now 20 years old and living in the autism community for 18 years now, I can honestly count on 1 hand how many people have ever volunteered for that activity. It takes a special person with a huge heart, love of people who are diverse with abilities and confidence to not allow others' stares and comments to deter their efforts to allow my sons experiences which all should be afforded.

I've seen Jerry mature even more over the years as I spent quality time with him each summer in long conversation. I've seen him court his now wife through their dating and chatted with him intimately about his plans for potential marriage and family. I've known Jerry to be responsible and motivated around maintaining a job and securing a profession that would allow him an avenue of the American dream of prosperity, owning his own home and raising a family, poising them for a good, sound life. Not one of riches and wealth, yet one of quality relationships, family filled with like aged cousins and teaching core values of love and giving back.

Fast forward a year or two later, I had the good fortunate of meeting Benjamin, his beautiful son. When I was with Jerry, his wife and Benjamin, Jerry was supportive to watch over Benjamin, who might have been 9 months at the time, far more than most new dads. He was

loving, responsible and proud of his son. He never waived in his parental duties and I knew then that Benjamin was in good hands with loving parents.

I've not seen Jerry in ~ 2 years, yet keep in touch via text and through family ties. My assumption is that Jerry is still the same "gentle giant" as he's been throughout the past 8 years as I've known him to be. He is a capable young man, a steadfast professional striving to develop a needed skill and trade to better himself while provide a stable environment for his young family. He understands responsibility to his family, neighbors, community and country.

While being a rather typical young American, Jerry will always stand out in my mind because of his values and warmth that he's displayed over the years towards my sons with disabilities. His lovingness and big heart are his true characters. And for that, I will be forever grateful. I am available, at any time, to have a conversation should you need more detail or insight:
571.221.2021

Respectfully submitted,

Maggie Hessel

Former Naval Officer, 1985 – 1996

Working mother of Christian and Cole Hessel, who live with severe autism
Seneca, SC